

## LOSS, GRIEF, REMINISCENCE, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN CHAUCER'S *BOOK OF THE DUCHESS*

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Loss drives the plot in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*: the loss of the Narrator, then the loss of Alcione in the book read by the Narrator, and finally the loss of the Man in Black in the Narrator's dream. These losses cause grief; responses to grief structure every part of the action.

That Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* has both a "secular consolation" of remembrance and psychological/medical principles has been well argued by A.J. Minnis (73-160); he concludes that "the medical 'cure by contrary' principle" has limitations "as a reading strategy for the *Book of the Duchess* because its oppositions of grief and joy . . . are simply too neatly dichotomistic to provide an adequate discourse for criticism of the poem in its entirety" (158). Finally, Minnis says, "The consolation offered by the *Book of the Duchess* is not the consolation of philosophy or theology but the consolation of experience, and the memories of that experience which are evergreen. . . ." Supported by these insights—a medical therapeutic "cure by contrary" principle well-known in the Middle Ages, and a secular consolation of remembrance—one may turn to the modern-day structure of grief therapy to provide a more complete process of consolation and healing.

My argument is two-fold: (1) that the plot of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* parallels the processes of grief therapy and reminiscence, and (2) that this structure, with its techniques of coping with loss, is another example of "lasting" popular culture, passed along from generation to generation, and used by artists to give shape to their works of beauty. This argument emphasizes both the poem's depth of meaning and the healing creativity of the Narrator/Dreamer/Poet. This creativity includes the comic structure of restoration in the Green World and structural use of number and number symbolism.

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The initial occasion of the poem is the Narrator's eight-year grief over an unspecified loss; this grief leads to a kind of bibliotherapy (Cook and Dworkin 75-77; Rando, *Grief* 99; Kaminsky 226-27) as the sleepless, melancholic Narrator turns to a book with the ancient story of Ceyx and Alcione (Minnis 148-49). After puzzling humorously over some allusions to gods in this story, the Narrator falls asleep to dream of his experiences in the Green World of May and of his encounter with the Man in Black.

This last, longest section emphasizes the grief of the Man in Black, usually but not always identified as John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and Earl of Richmond (Benson 970n; Robertson 463-66). Thus the immediate occasion for the poem is ordinarily considered to be the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, his first wife (Benson 329), especially since White is the name given the beloved in the dream (948). The appropriateness of the poem to the occasion thus becomes a question of consolation and healing. Seeing the structure in the Dream section as analogous to the use of grief therapy and reminiscence helps explain how the poem could bring that psychological help.

Although the idea of significant reminiscence is found in Plato (McMahon and Rhudick 292), the process of life review was first described by psychiatrist Robert N. Butler in the early 1960s as a "universal occurrence in older people of an inner experience or mental process of reviewing one's life" (65), although "of course, people of all ages review their past at various times [and] look back to comprehend the forces and experiences that have shaped their lives" (73; see also Lewis and Butler 165). Butler also suggested that the process could be helpful as therapy and pointed to the positive effect of life review shown in Bergman's movie *Wild Strawberries* as well as the tragic quality of the grieving process shown in stories by Henry James (69, 71-72). Additional development of the theory and strategies of reminiscence, as well as experiments to test both theory and

strategies, have continued to the present (Eckstrom 8-14; Butler, "Foreword"; Haight and Webster 1-21).

Reminiscence—extensive recollection of the past ("life review")—aims to overcome depression (Eckstrom 1) and is often used with those grieving over the death of a loved one (Linn 202; Eckstrom 8-10; McMahon and Rhudick 297). It is thus an adaptive technique for both general and specific depression and for all ages (Fallot 385, 397; Giambra; Lewis and Butler 165; Ebersole 145), though some evidence suggests that men benefit more than women (Eckstrom 13, 42; Fry 32; Haight and Webster 195-96).

Reminiscence seems at present to be considered more a technique for grief therapy or counseling than a therapy itself (Cook and Dworkin 80-82; Rando, *Treatment* 48-49; Haight and Webster 240, 273-286). Also, psychologists tend to reserve the term *therapy* for work done with individuals and groups by psychologists or psychiatrists, not including counselors. Thus, "grief process" is distinguished from "grief therapy" (Cook and Dworkin 10-11), and "life review therapy," which requires evaluation, is distinguished from "reminiscence" (Haight and Webster 240). Also the term *work* (as in "grief work" or "reminiscence work") tends to cover all the process of coping with grief, whether by individuals and their networks, by counselors, or by professional therapists.

Since the title of Haight and Webster's current textbook, *The Art and Science of Reminiscence*, reflects a growing consensus concerning the use of the term *reminiscence*, in this paper I use only that term, with the understanding that it is a technique of grief therapy. But, though professional therapists now usually distinguish *therapy* from *counseling* and *work*, in this paper I shall continue to use the phrase "grief therapy," both because of the more general definition of *therapy* ("healing power or quality," with the usage given in "the therapy of fresh air and sun" – *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1993) and because it is

under this subject heading that libraries make available the wide range of information on coping with loss.

Reminiscence by a depressed mourner with an active listener makes up most of the Dream section of *The Book of the Duchess*. The Narrator/Dreamer moves into the forest in the company of "hert-hunters" (hart/heart), but he then follows a "whelp" further into the forest, where he finds a "man in blak" and overhears him memorialize the loss and death of his lady in a traditional "complaint." The Knight is young, but his life has already included the full range of love. He is led through a review of his life with his beloved White by the Dreamer, who asks questions that incite reminiscence and that lead the Knight through his early wooing ("courtly love") phase, to his deeper and more fulfilled phase, to his understanding that he and White indeed had had a good life, and to his final ability to face the stark reality that his lost lady is indeed dead, not in eleven lines of formal, traditional "complaint," but in three words, "She ys ded!"

Reminiscence with its life review supports grief therapy, which antedates reminiscence by decades (Rando, *Grief* 76-77). Aspects of grief therapy, well described by Therese A. Rando (*Grief, Treatment*, ch.2), also help answer the question of the appropriateness of the poem to the occasion.

The primary aspect of grief therapy, analogous to the emphasis in *The Book of the Duchess* on the Knight, is the development of a "new relationship with the lost loved one," beginning with a memory of the deceased as someone who lived and died (Rando, *Grief* 78). According to this analysis, mourners first "must accept the reality of the loss. . . . They must also experience the pain of grief, not just accept the loss" (85).

This is the point to which the Knight comes at the end of the dream. In response to the Dreamer's question, "'Sir,' quod I, 'where is she now?'" the Knight gives a stunned response: "'Now?' quod he, and stynte anoon. / Therwith he wax as ded as stoon" (1298-1300; cf. Peck 88). Then the Knight re-states his

grief and connects his lady directly to the great loss of which he had earlier spoken to the Dreamer and to which he had referred metaphorically. The Dreamer asks one clinching question: "'Allas, Sir, how? What may that be?'" (1308), after which the Knight can state directly and in the strongest affirmative, "'She ys ded!' 'Nay!' 'Yis, be my trouthe'" (1309).

After the Knight's declaration of the reality of the death of his beloved White, the scene shifts physically from the place of his depression to "a long castel with walles white, / Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil" (1318-19). Found here are four allusions to John of Gaunt, the grieving husband, Duke of Lancaster and Earl of Richmond (Benson 329, 976): not only the name of his name-saint but also three puns connected with him (*long castel* for *Lancaster*, also *Loncastel*; *walles white*, reminiscent of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster; and *ryche hil* for *Richmond*). This new environment corresponds to the "redefinition of the griever's relationship with the deceased" by "adjust[ment] to the environment in which the deceased is missing" and to "the final task [which] is the withdrawal of emotional energy and the reinvestment of it in other relationships" (Rando, *Grief* 85). That this redefinition is in process is implied not only by the castle with white walls (White is now outside, not inside) but also by the transition lines that follow the Dreamer's sympathetic line: "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!" (1310):

And with that word right anoon  
They gan to strake forth; as was doon,  
For that tyme, the hert-huntyng. (1311-13)

Again a pun—for now, hart/heart-hunting was over.<sup>1</sup>

A second aspect of grief therapy, analogous to the Narrator/Dreamer, is the role played by the caregiver. The purpose of such a caregiver is to encourage verbalization of feelings and recollection of the deceased by giving the mourner "repeated

opportunities to be heard nonjudgmentally, to express the pain of separation, to accept the finality of the loss" (Rando, *Grief* 89). Indeed, the caregiver must help the mourner accept the loss intellectually by encouraging "continued review of the relationship and discussion of the loss" (90) and by "allow[ing] the bereaved to cry and cry, talk and talk, review and review without the interruption of [the caregiver's] sanity" and without early closure (93). The caregiver must "encourage such expression without analyzing or interpreting it" and should "encourage the griever to realistically review and talk about the deceased and their mutual relationship[; h]ave him discuss its ups and downs, its course and development, its crises and joys—all aspects of it through the years" (94). This focus on the memories of the past provides psychological consolation by freeing the mourner from the past: "Each story told, each memory relived, each feeling expressed represents a tie to the deceased that the griever must process by remembering, feeling the emotions generated by it, and then letting it go" (93-94). Finally, the caregiver must assist the mourner in "remember[ing] the deceased as life continues" (78) and in "integrating the past with the new present" (79).

The caregiver must use additional specific strategies beyond "acceptance and nonjudgmental listening," among which the following seem most relevant to this present analysis: "reach out to the bereaved"; "be present physically, as well as emotionally"; "tolerate and support . . . the entire process of mourning"; understand "the dynamics of a given bereavement situation" in order to give appropriate intervention; "evaluate the presence of illogical or magical thinking"; and elicit a "description of what the loss means to the mourner by the mourner" (79-85). The caregiver also must be realistic, must expect to "have to tolerate volatile reactions" and "intense angry protest" from the mourner, must make sure to view the loss from the mourner's unique perspective, and must show genuine concern and caring (86-89).

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Reading the Dream section with this analysis of the caregiver's role in mind will lessen concern about the Dreamer's "denseness" and the Knight's lengthy reminiscences and will emphasize the effect of the Dreamer, both as questioner and as patient listener, on the Knight's healing.<sup>2</sup> The Dreamer comes upon the Knight and observes and hears enough to know that the Knight is extremely depressed. Although the Knight's "complaint" to his dead lady may be traditional in medieval terms and so might be "misinterpreted" by the Dreamer, in the analogy of modern grief therapy it is the initial intellectual idealization of the lost loved one (Rando, *Treatment* 415). It is also the beginning opportunity for the caregiver, who reaches out to the mourner, remaining with the Knight physically as he encourages the mourner to remember, to feel, to understand, and so, in some sense, to let go. Again and again the Dreamer asks for more reminiscence, encouraging the review of the entire relationship in all its aspects; again and again the Knight responds with protest and illogical thinking.

First the Dreamer offers to help amend the Knight's woe (548-54), but he concludes by asking the Knight to tell of his sorrows: "Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte, / That semeth ful sek under your syde" (556-57). The Knight denies he can be helped, but he goes on to explain that the cause of his depression is Fortune, who, in a chess game, has taken his "fers" (queen: Benson 972n; Bolens and Taylor 332). The Dreamer urges him to have some pity on his human nature; this urging causes the Knight to say the Dreamer does not understand, and so the Dreamer asks for more information:

Good sir, telle me al hooley  
In what wyse, how, why, and wherefore  
That ye have thus youre blysse lore. (746-48)

The Knight then explains how in his youth he was in love with Love and how he first saw White, whom he then describes in

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great detail. The Dreamer's comment that she was the best for anyone who looked with the Knight's eyes leads the Knight not only to respond vehemently that everyone thought the same but also to continue to express his love for her. The Dreamer then guides the Knight back to the point of his loss, and the Knight tells of the first song he wrote for her, of her negative response to his love, of his woe, and of her finally giving

The noble yifte of hir mercy,  
Savynge hir worship by al weyes—  
Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.  
And therwith she yaf me a ryng;  
I trowe hyt was the firste thing. . . . (1270-73)

Thereafter, says the Knight, "She took me in hir governaunce" (1286) and they became as one ("Oo blysse and eke oo sorwe bothe" [1293]). At this point the Dreamer asks where she is now, the Knight faces his loss directly, and the Dreamer expresses his deep sympathy. And with that word of genuine concern the dream moves to the new present.

This analysis shows the appropriateness of the dream to the occasion of the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, whether it occurred shortly before or some time in the past (Benson 976n). Such analysis can be extended, however, to show a relationship among the three parts of the poem (cf. Prior and Wilson). The Narrator/Dreamer/Poet has undergone his own grief therapy—from depression and sterile inactivity, through the old romance of Ceyx and Alcione with its stoic acceptance of death, to the contemporary romance of the dream itself.<sup>3</sup>

His depression involves inability to sleep; the old romance stresses both the importance of sleep and of dreams. The dream of the contemporary romance then gives him "queynte" content for a poem. His depression at the beginning also involves inability to reminisce ("Passe we over until eft; / That wil not be mot nede be



left" [41-42]); the old romance shows the effect of lack of reminiscing, when Alcione accepts the loss of her husband but then, without anyone to help her grieve and to help her move through her grief to re-integration into society, dies almost immediately—an effect very similar to the discovery of modern investigators that many of those who could not reminisce were often dead within the year after their loss (Eckstrom 9; McMahon and Rhudick 293); and the dream becomes part of the Dreamer's own immediate past and provides not only the content for a poem but also the impetus to turn reminiscence into a poem ("“and that anon.’ / This was my sweven; now hit ys doon”: [1333-34]).

The analogies of reminiscence and grief therapy help the reader recognize the appropriateness of the dream to the occasion and of the whole poem as a framework for that occasion. For the poem memorialized the irreplaceable memory of the lost one (Rando, *Grief* 102-3) within a memorial to memory—or reminiscence—itsself. As it brings closure to the theme of memory, the poem also brings the closure necessary to the mourner in grief therapy (Rando, *Grief* 95-96) by helping to “replenish the severe depletion resulting from major loss” (Rando, *Grief* 99) and to re-establish a system of belief or meaning (Rando, *Grief* 102-3).

The text leads readers through and beyond the multiple perspectives of the Narrator/Dreamer/Poet, the old romance, and the Black Knight, from reminiscence to reminiscence, to find the theme not only of acceptance of death as the beginning of consolation after reminiscence but also of the significance of the process of time, which moves those grieving over loss from sterile inactivity through engagement with life and reminiscence to new beginnings. This significance of the process of time is suggested when the Narrator/Dreamer/ Poet near the end of the poem quotes what he said to himself upon awakening, although it is the reader who recognizes fully the significance of the phrase for the whole poem:

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Thys ys so queynt a sweven  
That I wol, be processe of tyme,  
Fonde to put this sweven in ryme. . . . (1330-32)

Indeed, while the phrase seems to mean literally that it will take some time to write a poem about the dream, the reader sees the importance of the "process of time" in healing both the Black Knight and the Narrator through the process of grief therapy with reminiscence.

This process at minimum, as I have argued, provides a helpful analogy in the discussion of the structure of *The Book of the Duchess*. I would argue further that the process is embedded in the poem and that Chaucer would have known and used it because coping with grief over loss is a constant human necessity and because the negative and positive reactions to this necessity, analyzed by the twentieth century, have always been the only possible human responses. Indeed, today's therapists write of the ancient, immemorial, universal quality of the grief process. For example, Gersie notes the "ancient knowledge" and "old roads" (89), and Cook and Dworkin (14) cite Joseph Campbell's description of the "hero's journey" as "the path of coming to terms with some of the most basic realities of our existence" (see also Gersie 212-13). Furthermore the grief process is embedded in myths and folktales told over the generations (Gersie 214, 223-27, 230).

Therapists also expect this process to be known, to be used, and to be effective as most people work through their grief with the support only of their network of friends, not with professional therapists. For example, Gersie tells us that story "may provide us with mirror-like reflections of aspects of ways of being" (156), that "ancient knowledge tells us that if we want to survive, we too must do what humankind has invariably done" (87), and that "since time immemorial metaphor and the story's sequential imagery have been used to activate people's emotional and cognitive ways of

coping" (214). Also Leick and Davidson-Nielsen call grief "a universal human emotional process which heals psychological wounds" (169) and which is managed by most individuals by means of their "sufficient emotional resources and a network adequate to cope with the grief process without professional help" (171).

This process, variously analyzed as stages or tasks (Cook and Dworkin 15-17) or phases and processes (Rando, *Treatment* 30-60), but embedded in ancient knowledge, including myths and folktales, does not sound like the domain of the elite but rather of "lasting" popular culture (Homan, "Chaucer" 31; "Beauty" 43-44). This aspect of popular culture is included in Ray Browne's definition of popular culture as "all aspects of the world we inhabit: the way of life we inherit, practice and pass on to our descendants" ("Popular Culture" [1984] 1) and as "the culture we inherit from our forebears, use throughout our lives and then pass on to our descendants" ("Popular Culture" [1987] 2). Also implicit in this part of the definition are structures of thought, such as Group Dynamics (Homan, "Chaucer" 31). Grief therapy with reminiscence is another such structure.

The structure closes as grief therapy helps "replenish the severe depletion resulting from major loss" (Rando, *Grief* 99) and re-establish a system of belief or meaning (Rando, *Grief* 102-3); for the Black Knight the new environment with its symbolism implies this replenishment and this new meaning. But the action of the Dreamer is not complete until he determines to write the poem and then does so.

This burst of artistic creativity is one possible result of the healing in grief therapy. The first step in the Narrator's coping with this grief came as he read an old story, just as grief therapy suggests that "intellectually . . . literature . . . can aid the griever in finding meaning in the loss . . ." (Rando *Grief* 99; cf. Cook and Dworkin 76-77). Grief therapy also suggests that a new bond with life (Gersie 126) comes with "activity" and "a structured approach

to time," which "helps us to experience a degree of control" (Gersie 236). This activity may arise from "the restoration of the capacity to create 'symbolic' utterances [which] results in the easement of tension and contributes to the healing of pain" (Gersie 236). As Gersie also explains, "[T]he realisation that we are truly alive and that we will surely die can lead to a profound sense of wonder, a deepened awareness of beauty. This in turn may lead to a desire to create, to make something which expresses our relationship with this awe-inspiring creation" (36).

In this poem the Narrator/Dreamer/Poet goes from depression caused by a loss to bibliotherapy to a dream of someone else whose grief process ends in two symbolic lines concerning his new environment. But it is this Narrator/Dreamer/Poet who puts the whole action of his own loss and grief into rhyme. Not only did he find a sense of humor concerning the gods after his reading of the story of Ceyx and Alcione; he has also found the romantic comic structure of movement into the Green World of Nature as the place of solving the problems of court and town (Frye 48, 182-84; Howes 43-54). Even the "helpful animal" of folktales (the whelp) leads the way. In addition, he has found the symbolism of numerology for the making of the whole poem.

Numerology brings the final sense of creative order to the healing of grief therapy for the Narrator/Dreamer/Poet as well as medieval aesthetic closure to the text. Already identified by Peck is the fact that the total number of lines in the poem is 1,333, a symbolic number of unity, since the sum of the individual integers (1+3+3+3) is ten (Peck 95).<sup>4</sup> Of course the line count in all editions (including Benson's, whose line numbers I use here), seems to be 1334 because editors skip one line for numbering purposes (line 481 follows line 479) to indicate the supposed defect in the Knight's eleven-line "complaint" (Peck 84 and n45). Eleven, however, a number both of excess and deficiency, would seem, as Peck points out (94-95), to be proper for this "courtly love" poem placed at the beginning of the Dreamer's reminiscence,

on the way to revelation, grace, and totality, symbolized by the number twelve.

The number twelve provides closure to the Dream—and thus to the grieving process: for example, the Knight says first (573) that he doesn't want to live "houres twelve," but by the end of the poem (1323), the Knight having survived through grieving to a new point in his life, the castle bell smites "houres twelve" (Peck 95, 100-02). The fact that these two twelves frame 750 lines (even with eleven lines in the Black Knight's "complaint") also has a heretofore unnoted symbolic significance, since the sum of the separate integers in 750 is also twelve. And beyond twelve is twenty-four (two twelves), a number symbolic of fullness and bounty, which as the stated age of the Black Knight (455) may be not realistic but symbolic of the closure still to come in his life (Peck 103).

The number symbolism in the complete line count increases the antecedent probability of additional number symbolism, as does its apparent later use in other works by Chaucer.<sup>5</sup> Also increasing the probability is the emphasis on the importance of number in a rather surreal passage early in the dream:

Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestes  
That thogh Argus [Albus], the noble countour,  
Sete to rekene in hys countour,  
And rekene with his figures ten—  
For by the figures mowe al ken,  
Yf they be crafty, rekene and noumbre,  
And tell of every thing the noumbre—  
Yet shoulde he fayle to rekene even  
The wondres me mette in my sweven.  
But forth they romed ryght wonder faste  
Doun the woode; so at the laste  
I was war of a man in blak. . . . (434-46)

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Here the one whelp the Dreamer was following has turned into numberless beasts that now seem to be leading him, but the emphasis is on the ten Arabic digits, for that time an advanced system for counting and numbering. The ten digits are emphasized by end rhyme (*ten/ken*); counting and numbering are emphasized both by two couplets with identical two-syllable rhyme words (*countour* and *noumbre*) and by the repetition of the word *rekene*, used four times in six lines (cf. Shippey 191-92). This passage alerts "crafty" readers not merely to the numberless beasts of the forest but also to the numbered wonders in the "sweven." The dream is later called "queynte" (1330), which can mean "elaborately contrived" (Benson 1281) or "ingeniously made, skillfully wrought; elaborate, intricate" (*MED queint[e]* adj. 2c), although both definitions cite *BD* 784 instead of 1330 as an example. (Indeed, Benson cites 1330 as an example of the definition "curious.")

Another, even earlier passage on the difficulty of interpretation of the Dream may already have made a "crafty" reader look for intricate patterns in this "so ynly swete a sweven":

Y fil aslepe, and therwith even  
Me mette so ynly swete a sweven,  
So wonderful that never yit  
Y trowe no man had the wyt  
To konne wel my sweven rede.  
No, not Joseph, withoute drede,  
.....  
Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus  
.....  
I trowe, arede my dremes even. (275-89)

Joseph interpreted a dream with groups of sevens concerning the way to physical salvation; Macrobius, though seemingly credited here with writing the dream (285), preserved with

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commentary the dream of Scipio the Younger, in which, according to *The Parliament of Fowls* (29-84), Scipio the Younger dreams of his grandfather, Scipio Africanus, who shows him the nine spheres from which "speres thryes thre" (61) comes the melody "That welles is of music and melodye / In this world here, and cause of armonye" (62-63), and who then tells him the way to spiritual salvation (64-84). These two dreams include intricate patterns that require "crafty" interpreters, and thus their contrast with this dream seems to urge its readers to even greater "craftiness" in interpreting its intricacy. The number symbolism suggested for *The Book of the Duchess* makes the whole poem elaborately contrived and ingeniously made, and the "silent poetry" of the Middle Ages provides a meaningful modern closure in the final movement of the Narrator/Dreamer/Poet from his unnamed loss and grief to creativity, symbolism, and beauty.

In the polyvalent world of literature Christian interpretation, especially of the symbolic environment at the end of the Dream (Benson 976; Prior 19; Howard 159) and of number symbolism (Shippey 196-97), may be an added level; indeed it would not be the last movement to Christianity at the end of a poem by Chaucer. But the secular world of loss and grief therapy with reminiscence and even a concluding burst of creativity provides the discourse for a full reading of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*.<sup>6</sup>

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I identify "this kyng" of line 1314 with the Black Knight, whether literally, by shifting dream imagery (Benson 976), or by chess imagery (Bolens and Taylor 327, who do not mention this term in this line but who seem to confirm my hunch that "this kyng" refers back to the chess game with the Knight a newly victorious player).

<sup>2</sup> Howard points out that the "befuddled and confused" dreamer is a convention of French dream visions (153). Herzog (275-77) finds "no indication that this character [the narrator] could consciously urge the Black Knight through the various stages of grieving" but believes the author presents "a narrative in which a sorrowing lover is guided to what we might call a greater degree of psychological health." He agrees that Chaucer demonstrates his understanding of the process of grieving (280n) and he believes that for all the characters, including the narrator, "stories provide solutions to problems." The "dense" Dreamer may be Chaucer's first try at his comic persona, but in any event the questions move the plot. Bolens and Taylor see a knowledgeable Dreamer who "knows something of the games of chess and jeuparti" and whose "insistent questioning . . . breaks through the imagistic façade of the metaphor to its bare referent" (332). The Dreamer at the end becomes a "counseling replacement for the bereaved knight's lost *fers*."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lawton 53, 55, who finds more psychological growth in the *persona* than in the Black Knight.

<sup>4</sup> If one assumes this significance of the total number of lines, then that becomes a crucial part of the argument for the authenticity of lines 31-96, though Phillips and Blake ignore number symbolism in their arguments. Shippey, preferring "arithmetical mentality" to "numerology," finds a parallel eleven lines in the speech of the



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ghost of Ceyx to Alcione, finds Christian symbolism in eleven (death, sin, mourning, and end of mourning) as well as in 153 (the number of salvation), and finds symbolism of the Christian Trinity in both the Arabic and Roman numerals for the total number of lines (1333 and MCCCXXXIII)—the Three-in-One and One-in-Three (192-97). Stone, who argues for the authenticity of the eleven-line “complaint” (177-78), then seems to forget the poem has only 1,333 lines (220n), although the even sum of its integers would support his even/odd interpretation (143-98) of the poem of Blanks and Deuces (*Blanche* and *Duchess*). My interpretation of the lines as part of the grief therapy of the narrator also indicates they are an integral part of the poem.

<sup>5</sup> Peck 111-12nn43 and 49; Homan, “Chaucer’s Pardoner” 84-86, 90-91n2 (The death of Kenneth Lundgren, of Arlington, Virginia, now precludes his publication of his research, briefly outlined in this note.); Homan, “Chaucer, General Education” 36-37n; Frese 96-100, 148, 298-99n, 334 (“Number” and “Number Specificity”); Shippey, esp. 191-92, 196-98.

<sup>6</sup> This essay is a much-revised version of a presentation for a “Teaching Chaucer” session at the Fifth International Congress of the new Chaucer Society in Vancouver, British Columbia, in August 1988. The reminiscence-and-grief-therapy approach was worked out originally for my class in Chaucer at Bethany College (Kansas), and I recommend it as a “liberal arts” approach to a poem that may otherwise be set aside as too “occasional.” The popular culture aspect of this essay came to my mind too late, however, for any classes to hear of it, though it seems to me a good part of general education as well. Special thanks for sharing her research on reminiscence therapy is due Clarice Eckstrom, to whom I was referred by her husband Dr. Vance Eckstrom, the religion/philosophy professor with an office across the hall from mine. Later kind help with research on grief therapy came from Dr. Larry Rosenkoetter, one of Bethany’s professors of psychology.

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